

**Abstract ID :** 802

**Title :** Bottlenose Dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*, Strandings and Mortality on the West Coast of Florida, 1985-2002

**Category :** Strandings

**Student :** Not Applicable

**Preferred Format :** Poster Presentation

**Abstract :** Since 1985, the Stranding Investigations Program at Mote Marine Laboratory, Sarasota, Florida has been involved with cetacean carcass recovery and necropsy. Over this 18-year period, 315 bottlenose dolphins were examined from the Gulf of Mexico, with the majority of these strandings (n=251) occurring in Manatee and Sarasota counties, Mote's primary coverage area. The yearly mean number of stranded dolphins was 17 ( $\pm$  8.5 SD). The animals were comprised of 129 males, 120 females and 66 animals of unknown gender. For animals with total length available (n=240), 44% of the animals were less than 210 cm and estimated to be younger than three years of age. Of these young animals, 80% of neonates (n=35; <125 cm) stranded during spring and summer months, and 65% of probable calves (n=71; 125-210 cm) stranded during fall and winter, corresponding to documented reproductive seasonality. There was no seasonality of strandings for animals > 210 cm. Of the 315 dolphins examined, complete or partial post-mortem examinations were performed on 195 animals. Cause of death was determined by necropsy and/or histopathology findings. In 46% of the cases, cause of death could not be determined due to advanced decomposition (n=67) or open diagnoses (n=23). The mortality categories of the remaining animals (n=105) included fisheries/human interaction (14), trauma of unknown origin (18), perinatal mortality (28), and natural diseases (45). The stranding data presented here can be used as baseline information to evaluate future temporal and spatial changes in bottlenose dolphin stranding activity in this area. Understanding these patterns and causes of death in stranded dolphins will increase our knowledge of natural and human induced mortality in wild dolphin populations.